

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

21 January 2022

Asia

India: Emergency response workers protest in Himachal Pradesh

Emergency workers from the 108 Emergency Response Service and 102 Ambulance Service demonstrated in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh on January 17 demanding confirmation of their jobs. The state government recently outsourced the 108 and 102 services to a new contractor.

Nearly 300 employees working under the old company had not yet received a job offer from the new company. The workers had been employed for between eight and ten years in the service which is widely known as the National Ambulance Service (NAS).

The 108 Emergency Response Service provides integrated medical, police and fire emergency services and the 102 Free Ambulance Service is an emergency medical transport service.

The workers ended their day-long protest after they were given a vague assurance from the government that their demands would be addressed.

Telangana government teachers oppose forced transfers

Around 40 gazetted headmasters from several government schools staged a sit-down protest outside the Telangana Secretariat at Burgula Ramakrishna Bhavan in Hyderabad on Monday. Police detained the protesters and took them to the local police station.

The protest was against the state government's GO 317 order which allows the government authorities to unilaterally transfer women teachers and other employees to distant zones without consultation. Teachers alleged that they had opted for multi-zonal transfers but the government transferred them to other distant zones.

Jharkhand government contract nurses strike over unpaid wages

Contract nurses from the Namkum regional community health centre in Ranchi, Jharkhand, demonstrated at the centre's front gate on Monday over several demands.

The Jharkhand State NRHM-ANM/GNM Contract Employees Union said that contract nurses working in 14 blocks of the district have not been paid their salaries and are demanding pending wages for the past five months. Nurses also demanded an incentive payment for COVID-19 vaccination, a weekly day off and 16 days of casual leave each year.

Meghalaya teachers from government-aided schools demonstrate

Teachers from state government-aided schools protested outside the Meghalaya Secretariat in Shillong on Monday to demand the repair and upgrading of run-down government-aided school premises.

The Federation of All School Teachers of Meghalaya (FASTOM) accused the government of falsely promising at a meeting in 2018 that it would reply to their demands within two weeks. FASTOM demanded another meeting with the government over the issue.

Andhra Pradesh municipal contract workers demand permanency

Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) contract workers in Andhra Pradesh demonstrated outside the corporation offices on Wednesday over several demands. These included permanent jobs, equal pay for equal work and the kin of deceased workers to be offered a job. Workers accused the chief minister of making false promises, claiming that he had assured them, when canvassing for elections three years ago, that their demands would be granted.

Haryana rural healthcare workers strike

As part of a state-wide campaign, striking rural health (anganwadi) workers and helpers demonstrated in Gurgaon district, Haryana state, on Tuesday over several long outstanding demands. These included a 1,500-rupee pay rise (\$US20) for workers and 750 rupees for helpers, a rise in their status to skilled workers category, payment of a dearness allowance and 300,000 rupees in retirement benefits.

Around 50,000 anganwadi workers and helpers have been campaigning across Haryana since December. There are 26,000 anganwadi centres in 22 districts and all have suspended activities. It has been three years since the Modi government gave any increase in entitlements to anganwadi workers.

Pakistan: Balochistan police attack protesting health workers

The Pakistan territorial government of Balochistan mounted a brutal police crackdown on protesting doctors and paramedical staff from public hospitals in Quetta on January 12. The heavy police contingent baton-charged protesters as they marchers to the provincial assembly, injuring at least 10 and arresting up to 25.

Doctors and paramedics from the under-resourced hospitals were demanding decent facilities and modern equipment, along with the provision of medicines to patients at affordable prices.

Young Doctors Association (YDA) members have been boycotting

outpatient departments in public hospitals for three months. The protest had the support from doctors and paramedics from across the province. The government is rejecting a longstanding demand of the YDA for a pay increase.

The Imran Khan federal government has allowed services and facilities of public sector hospitals in Balochistan and other provinces to rapidly degrade as it freezes or slashes funding of the public health sector. The Pakistani government confronts a continuing devaluation of the Pakistan rupee, double-digit inflation and the decline of taxes on pharmaceuticals and other medical imports.

The Khan government has already announced the shutting down of district headquarters hospitals, claiming inefficiencies and lack of personnel. These hospitals have been the main providers of healthcare at district level.

Sri Lankan national zoo workers protest

Members of the Sri Lanka Public Zoological Department Employees Union and National Zoological Garden Activists' Union in Colombo struck work on Tuesday over maltreatment of animals by the zoo management. The workers also demanded 5,000-rupees (\$US25) accident allowance and called for removal of the director general.

Union members have threatened to not feed, bathe or administer medicines to zoo animals until their demands are granted. Workers allege that many animals have died because of neglect by management. Management has kept the zoo open hoping to break the strike.

Workers at the Ruhunu Safari Park in Hambantota, 247 km from Colombo, held a lunchtime protest on Tuesday in support of the National Zoo workers' struggle.

Taiwan: Migrant workers protest for freedom to change jobs

About 400 migrant workers demonstrated in Taipei on Sunday demanding the government allow them to freely switch employers. Holding banners stating their demands in several languages, demonstrators held a street procession and rallied outside the ministry of labor.

Under Taiwan's Employment Services Act migrant workers are not allowed to change employers, except under special circumstances, or with the consent of their employer and at the end of their contract.

A spokesperson from the Taiwan International Workers' Association and MENT, which is a coalition of seven groups that advocate for migrants' rights, said the system, which has existed for 30 years, traps migrant workers in "terrible" labour conditions.

The government responded to the protesters by issuing a statement that claimed, "Allowing migrant workers to freely change employers might result in increased hiring costs."

South Korea: CJ Logistics parcel delivery workers on strike

About 1,650 union members who are subcontracted workers for CJ Logistics, South Korea's leading parcel delivery company, have been on strike since December 28. They are demanding higher pay and improved

conditions and protesting against unsafe workloads. Strikers have held demonstrations in several parts of Seoul and are holding daily protests in front of the house of the CJ Group's president.

The union claims that CJ Logistics has failed to use the full amount of increased delivery charges that should have been spent to reduce workloads under a January deal between the government and logistics firms. The deal called for logistics companies to hire extra workers to sort parcels and take other steps to prevent overwork.

The agreement was made after mass protests following the death of 16 delivery workers allegedly caused by overwork. According to the union, CJ Logistics is spending only 30 percent of the increased shipping charges to improve working conditions for delivery workers.

The company claimed that only 8.5 percent of its total workforce are on strike, allowing it to operate with minimum interruptions. The workers' union, which has not made any attempt to campaign for support from other CJ Logistics workers, is affiliated with the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.

Australia

Sunbus drivers in Queensland hold three-day strike

About 150 drivers at Sunbus Sunshine Coast in southeast Queensland and 80 drivers from Marlin Coast Sunbus in Cairns, in the far north of the state, stopped work for 72 hours on Monday to demand better pay and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. The action followed 24-hour strikes in November and December.

While Sunbus said it had reached agreement on 30 claims presented by the Transport Workers Union (TWU), the union said the wage offer was unacceptable. Sunbus offered annual wage increases of 1.75, 3.25, 1.75 and 1.75 percent in the four-year agreement. The company's original offer was annual 0.5 percent increases provided drivers gave up public holiday entitlements.

Drivers want wage increases to be in line with increases to the Consumer Price Index, which stood at 3.8 percent for the 2020/21 financial year.

Tugboat operator Svitzer moves to terminate enterprise agreement

Svitzer, Australia's largest tugboat operator applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) on Tuesday to terminate its enterprise agreement with three different unions in a long-running dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The termination would force hundreds of crew members onto the industry award with minimum wages and conditions.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), the Australia Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) and the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE) have been in negotiations with Svitzer for a new work agreement since the current agreement expired in 2019. About 540 workers are affected.

The unions held a series of 12-hour and 24-hour stoppages last year in January, July and November at ports around Australia as part of the dispute. Svitzer's latest offer in November, which included 1.5 percent annual pay increases, well below the current CPI of over 3 percent, was rejected by workers.

Svitzer is part of the Maersk international shipping group, one of two main tugboat operators. It has a fleet of more than 100 tugs and more than 1,000 seafarers. Svitzer has declared that 22-year-old “legacy terms” in the old agreement were uncompetitive in the modern market and had to go.

In response to Svitzer’s move to terminate the enterprise agreement, the MUA admitted indirectly in a Facebook posting this week that it had dragged the dispute out over two years by holding limited ineffective industrial action. It said, “They have prodded us, they have poked us and they are trying to kick us. Now it’s time to really ramp up our campaign and fight back!” The MUA’s so-called “fight back” has consisted of legal action and threatening to step up industrial action.

Svitzer’s termination application follows within a week of stevedores Patrick Terminals’ application to the FWC to terminate its enterprise agreement covering MUA members at its port terminals around Australia. Similarly, tugboat operator Smit Lamnalco in December applied to the FWC to terminate its EA covering marine engineers and officers of the AMOU and AIMPE in Gladstone, the largest multi-commodity port in Queensland.



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